

EC DIRECTIVES AND THE CONTROL OF WATER POLLUTION



fact file



NRA

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Membership of the European Economic Community has had a dramatic effect upon the United Kingdom's environmental policy, particularly in relation to water pollution law. Since 1973 the EC has agreed more than 300 measures relating to environmental protection.

One of the purposes of EC legislation is to set standards in order to minimise competitive disadvantage between Member States.

EC environmental legislation generally takes the form of a "Directive". EC directives define compulsory objectives and standards and set timetables for their achievement. A directive, however, is not legally enforceable in a Member State, and must be incorporated into national law. The measures laid down in national policy must be at least as stringent as those contained in the original EC directive.

In England and Wales the National Rivers Authority is the "competent authority" responsible for the implementation of directives relating to surface water quality.

1). The following EC directives are concerned with the control of pollution of waters:

Dangerous Substances Directive (76/464/EEC)

This sets out a framework for the control of water pollution by certain dangerous substances. These substances are grouped into List I (blacklist) selected on the basis of their toxicity, persistence and bioaccumulation; and List II (greylist), of substances which can also have a deleterious effect on the aquatic environment.

Member States must take steps to eliminate pollution by List I substances, and reduce pollution by List II substances. However, a substance does not become subject to List I methods of control until a "daughter" directive has been agreed.

Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC)

The objective of this directive is to protect the environment from adverse effects which could arise from the discharge of effluent from sewage treatment works and certain industrial sectors.

It sets standards for the collection, treatment and effluent quality for such discharges, together with time scales for the achievement of these.

Nitrate Directive (91/676/EEC)

The aim of this directive is to reduce water pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources; primarily the application and storage of inorganic fertilizers and

manure. In addition to the protection of drinking water supplies the directive also targets the problem of eutrophication.

Detergent Directive (73/404/EEC)

This sets out a framework for several directives relating to the biodegradability of detergents. The sale of detergents having less than 90% average biodegradability of surfactant must be prohibited by Member States under this directive.

Sludge to Land Directive (86/278/EEC)

This directive sets restrictions on the application of sewage sludge to agricultural land in terms of the concentrations of certain heavy metals allowed in the sludge and receiving soil. Limits are also set for the amounts of heavy metals which can be added to soil over a ten year period.

Asbestos Directive (87/217/EEC)

This directive covers the reduction and prevention of environmental pollution by asbestos from discharges to air, land and water.

2). Those directives which are involved with protecting waters for specific purposes are outlined below:

Surface Water Abstraction Directive (75/440/EEC)

The purpose of this directive is to ensure that surface water abstracted for drinking water is of certain quality and receives adequate treatment before entering public supply.

Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC)

The objective of this directive is to maintain or improve the quality of bathing waters for amenity reasons, and to protect public health. 19 physical, chemical and microbiological standards are laid down in the directive.

Freshwater Fish Directive (78/1659/EEC)

This sets physical and chemical standards for fresh waters identified as requiring improvement or protection in order to support fish life.

Shellfish Waters Directive (79/923/EEC)

This directive sets standards for the quality of waters identified as requiring protection or improvement in order to provide a satisfactory environment for shellfish. It is not in itself designed to ensure shellfish quality for human consumption.

